

# Wounded Warriors Building a Bridge to the Past:

Operation Ancestor Search is the NSSAR's new patriotic program that provides genealogy training and assistance to our nation's injured military service members. OAS utilizes SAR Compatriots' genealogy knowledge and experience to assist wounded service members to learn about their family history and teach them basic genealogy skills. The program is currently active at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and the Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas.

OAS provides injured service members with the knowledge and tools that allow them to conduct their genealogy research as they recover from their injuries. SAR volunteers provide genealogy training classes, work sessions and individual assistance to the OAS participants at the military hospitals. A key aspect of the program is the ability to offer genealogy resources to the injured service members and Ancestry.com has generously provided access to its online databases for the participants' use.

Compatriot Carl Bedell, the founder of OAS, developed the program based on the idea that the genealogy expertise within the SAR could be used to give back to the U.S. service members who were injured in service to our nation. "Many of the wounded soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines have a long road to recovery and spend months if not years recuperating from their injuries at military



*This photo, discovered by one of the OAS participants on Ancestry.com, shows the soldier's great-grandparents in the 1880s*

hospitals," Bedell said. "Operation Ancestor Search can provide these brave men and women a respite from the constant reminders of their injuries. OAS allows the SAR to express its gratitude for the sacrifices made by our nation's injured armed service members."

The D.C. Society Sons of the American Revolution initiated Operation Ancestor Search in May 2010 and operated the program for more than a year at the former Walter Reed

Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. In September 2011, the hospital moved to a newly built facility in Bethesda, Md., now called the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. The OAS moved with it. Since

the program began, DCSSAR compatriots have assisted more than 100 members of the armed services research their genealogy, with the help of more than 15 volunteer compatriot trainers.

In March 2011, upon the motion of former President General Judge Ed Butler, the National Society's Executive Committee supported the development of a National Committee to expand the program to other SAR chapters. The Brooke Army Medical Center is the first expansion location for OAS. The San Antonio Chapter of the Texas State Society began its program in September 2011. The chapter's first training session was filled to capacity and the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive.

The benefits of the program have won strong support for it from the military medical cadre. Besides offering a reprieve to the participants, the research they conduct acts as a stress reducer and nearly always puts them in touch with their family.

In several cases, participants have even connected with distant cousins who lived close enough to the military hospital to visit the injured service member. Participation in the program also provides a personal connection with the past, and participants are often proud to discover their ancestors also served in the military.

Operation Ancestor Search has been a tremendous success at both Walter Reed and Brooke Army medical centers. Capt. Samuel Hoffman has participated in the program at Walter Reed since early 2011. "This exceeded my expectations and speaks volumes to me," he said. "I have a newfound respect and understanding for family heritage and only now realize how important knowing where you come from affects self-worth and direction for continued personal growth." Through the assistance of OAS volunteers, Hoffman discovered his

*"I just wanted to take a moment to thank you all for offering this program. This has given me the opportunity to get out of my room and connect with others in an environment where I feel safe, and has allowed me to connect to my family and my heritage ... I have learned of, connected, and communicated with a whole side of my family we never even knew and it is awesome! ... It is a great learning experience and has been an invaluable tool in helping me heal here at Walter Reed, and I cannot thank you enough for the wonderful opportunity you have given us."*

— PFC. HEATHER CUMMINGS

# NSSAR's Operation Ancestor Search Program

ancestors served on both sides of the Civil War and also in the Revolutionary War.

Capt. Brad Mellinger began working with OAS as he was finishing nearly four years of therapy for injuries sustained after being shot by a sniper in Iraq. The skills and resources Mellinger received through the program allowed him to trace his lineage to the Revolutionary War. After completing his therapy and returning to his unit, Mellinger sent a message to OAS that said, "Knowing the family stories can help increase the honor in one's name just by knowing how you came to be, where you are now, and the sacrifices from those who came before you."

Operation Ancestor Search's success is due to the dedication of compatriot volunteers and outside supporters. Ancestry.com has been the largest benefactor to OAS by providing access to its databases and numerous other genealogy resources. "We are extremely grateful for the help that Ancestry.com has provided with this important initiative," said Compatriot Brock Bierman, co-chair of the NSSAR's OAS program. "I can see firsthand how their resources have impacted the research efforts of our participants. The Wounded Warriors have seen a lot of 'wow' moments during their research and this is directly related to Ancestry.com's help."

Other organizations such as Fold3 (formerly Footnote) and the National Archives and Records Administration also have supported the program. Fold3 provides access to its resources for the program participants. The National Archives has provided genealogy material and allowed its archivists to provide training at the work sessions. Archivist Connie Potter of the National Archives has attended several of the programs at Walter Reed and provided training on the National Archives' genealogy holdings and records related to the Civil War.

"The success of Operation Ancestor

Search has quickly exceeded the original expectations," Bedell said. "But as the program grows, it is clear that we have barely scratched its potential." The NSSAR Operation Ancestor Search Committee is actively researching potential expansion

locations for the next OAS program. If your chapter is interested in starting an Operation Ancestor Search program at a local military medical facility, or if you are interested in working with the National Committee, contact Bedell at oas@dcssar.org.

**DEPARTMENT OF WAR.**

*Regulations for the Officers and Soldiers of the Revolutionary War who acquired a right to Land from the United States, but have not received it.*

By an Act of Congress, of the 16th September, 1776, it is provided, that the Officers and Soldiers who engaged for, and continued to serve, during the War, or until discharged by Congress, shall receive land in proportion to their rank.

N. B. Those who engaged for three years, or for any other period than during the war, are not entitled to land from the United States.

The following declaration must be filled up and sworn to by the claimant :

State of Maryland }  
County of Stearns }

I, Henry Hoffmann aged 79 years, do upon oath testify and declare, that, I entered the service of the United States on the fifth day of September in the year 1782, for the term of during the war and that I served in the company commanded by Captain Sheber in the Regiment No 2, commanded by Pennsylvania Regiment of the 24 June 1783 and was honorably discharged on the 24 June 1783 in the year 17, from the Regiment commanded by as appears on the book of the certificate in the war there was to be or during the last of June

I further declare, that I have never received a warrant for the Bounty Land promised to me on the part of the United States; nor have I ever assigned or transferred my claim in any manner whatsoever: therefore,

**Know** all men by these presents, that I, Henry Hoffmann aforesaid, do hereby constitute and appoint Henry R. Harshbarger to be my true and lawful attorney, for me and in my name to demand and receive from the Secretary of War of the United States, a warrant for the quantity of Land due to me as aforesaid; and my said attorney is hereby fully authorized and empowered to constitute and appoint one or more substitutes or attorneys under him for the special purposes above expressed.

Attest,  
Geo. Rohr

I, Henry Harshbarger aged 50 years do upon oath, declare that I have been long acquainted with Henry Hoffmann who has subscribed the above declaration in my presence, and well know that he is the identical person he therein represents himself to be; and further, I do believe, that he did perform the military service therein stated.

Attest,  
Geo. Rohr Henry Harshbarger

Before me, Geo. Rohr Justice of the Peace for the State of Maryland, and for Stearns County personally appeared the above named Henry Hoffmann subscriber to the foregoing declaration, and in my presence acknowledged the power of attorney thereto subjoined, to be his free act and deed; and, likewise, personally appeared Henry Harshbarger who hath subscribed the above certificate of identity, both to me well known to be men of respectability and truth, and made solemn oath to the truth of the depositions by them respectively subscribed, this second day of January 1836

Geo. Rohr Justice of the Peace.

In testimony that the above-written Geo. Rohr was a magistrate authorized to administer oaths, and take acknowledgments, &c., in the State of Maryland at the above date, and that his name there subscribed appears to me to be his usual signature, I have hereunto affixed the county seal, and subscribed my name and quality, at Stearns this 9<sup>th</sup> day of February 1836

Henry Schley C. Clerk, &c.

Right, documentation for a land grant for an ancestor of Capt. Samuel Hoffmann's who served in the Revolutionary War